

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

United States Post Office and Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

Federal Building/U.S. Post Office (Stewart Station)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

301 East Stewart Avenue

n/a NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Las Vegas

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

na

STATE

Nevada 89101

CODE

32

COUNTY

Clark

CODE

003

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY**☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT**OWNERSHIP**☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**☒ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS**☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE**☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO**PRESENT USE**☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☒ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☐ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

General Services Administration Region IX

STREET & NUMBER

525 Market Street

CITY, TOWN

San Francisco

n/a VICINITY OF

STATE

California 94105

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Clark County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

200 East Carson Street

CITY, TOWN

Las Vegas

STATE

Nevada

89101

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Las Vegas: Historic Preservation Inventory & Planning Guidelines

DATE

1978

☐ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Historic Preservation & Archeology

CITY, TOWN

Carson City

STATE

Nevada

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT

☐ GOOD

☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED

☐ RUINS

☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED

☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE

☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Federal Building/Post Office (originally called the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse; called Federal Building in this nomination) is situated within the sprawling urban setting of the desert city of Las Vegas. The building is located on the north side of Stewart Avenue on a site which is, atypically, not a corner site; it is centered on Third Street (almost - see Addendum, Item 8) with a vista down the street intended to be grandiose. Located in a six-block Civic Center just north of the central business district, the Federal Building sits among several city buildings, including the ten-story new City Hall to the east. Four blocks south are the Clark County Courthouse and the more recent Federal Courthouse. The Federal Building is surrounded by paved parking lots: public lots to the east, west and south and a parking/loading area behind the building to the north. To the southwest is the Lady Luck Casino Dealer's School, a single-story structure with stucco walls and a red tile roof; beside that to the west is the six-story concrete Binion's Horseshoe Casino parking garage, and beside that is the Del Webb's Mint parking garage, also six stories.

The building is faced south-southwest toward Stewart Street and is set back from the sidewalk in a small grassed lawn as is typical for a federal building of the period. Most of this lawn in the front has been taken up by the wide granite stair which ascends from the sidewalk to the raised first floor level and by the concrete handicapped ramp west of the central stair. Trees have been planted alongside the building on its front and two sides, set within the small grassy areas which remain, and site furniture consists of the handrails for the stairs and ramps.

The Federal Building itself is massed as a great three story block, 119'10" wide by 76'0" deep. The front facade features a central colonnade flanked on both sides by massive end bays. This enframed block configuration - central colonnade or arcade anchored on both sides by symmetrical solid corner elements - is an arrangement developed in 18th century France and adapted by American government and private architects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for a wide variety of public and institutional buildings. The neoclassical arrangement took on several appearances as the architects varied the scale, proportion and detailing, but at its core it represented the type of classicism favored by the Treasury Department as appropriate for federal architecture. The building also displays the classical vertical hierarchy of base, body and cap - the base formed by the raised foundation, the body by the brick walls and great colonnade and the cap by the entablature and parapet. The building represents mainline, albeit eclectic, neoclassicism with its large flat-sided Ionic columns, formal loggia (since altered), classical moulded and dentiled entablature and Georgian balustraded parapet. It is typical of the hundreds of similar structures designed by the Supervising Architect's office of the Treasury, but the refinement of proportions, details and use of materials and the building's size distinguish the Las Vegas Federal Building as a regionally important example of the style.

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The building is covered with a flat concrete slab roof, with composition roofing over; the roof is bordered with a parapet, a Georgian Revival element made up of terra cotta components. Classified as a fireproof structure, it is supported by a structural steel frame which holds pan type concrete floor and roof slabs. All of the four facades are organized with typical neoclassical symmetry, with the front and sides featuring the prominent colonnades. These are the focal points for the building, made up of terra cotta parts which give stylistic distinction to what would otherwise be a plain brick box. The front colonnade has eight massive columns, the sides six. Each column is engaged by the wall behind, flat-sided and fluted, with Ionic capital, compound moulded base and plain plinth. The front colonnade is set within a terra cotta-faced bay which projects slightly from the end bays; the side colonnades are flush with the wall, with no projection, and all three colonnades are placed in the second and third floors, a design device which gives the building a more imposing countenance. The first floor is faced with flat terra cotta panels, punctuated by simply framed windows on the east and west facades and by a six-bay arcade on the south (front). This arcade was originally open, leading into a shallow loggia which in turn enters into the main lobby, but the openings have since been infilled with aluminum window/doors to create an entry vestibule. The rear facade is dominated by the large first-floor loading dock with cantilevered metal canopy over. The dock extends the width of a central bay which projects several feet beyond the flanking symmetrical sides. Centered in this bay are three large Georgian windows with a smaller window on each side. Like the front and sides, the rear features terra cotta siding on the first floor level, with brick on the second and third floors.

The building title is mounted in the entablature over the colonnade on the front. Originally "United States Post Office" in attached metal letters, the original title has been moved to one side several feet to allow the addition of "Federal Building-." The building's cornerstone, laid in a 1931 ceremony, is located in the foundation at the southeast corner and is inscribed:

A.W. Mellon Secretary of the Treasury

James A. Wetmore Acting Supervising Architect

1931

An article printed in the Las Vegas Evening Review announcing the November 1932 opening of the Post Office described the original layout of the first floor of the facility:

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There are 11 windows in the new postoffice room, but all of them will not be used, (Postmaster) Ryerse explained. There will be two general delivery windows, a stamp window, postal savings and registered mail, and money order windows. The parcel post window, for incoming and outgoing parcel post will have ample space to handle all of the parcel post needs of Las Vegas.

In the rear of the building there is a large loading platform which is separate from the workingroom of the postoffice proper, and in the west wing of the basement a large storeroom has been set aside for the use of the postoffice.

One of the features of the new postoffice is a "swing room" for the mail carriers, a recreation room equipped with comfortable chairs, reading tables, and a shower bath, for the mail carriers while waiting for mail distribution.

The windows discussed in the article were situated around a central U-shaped main public lobby, entered from the front loggia. The lobby and other first floor spaces have undergone some change since the building's opening, but the public spaces have retained a degree of integrity. The lobby has been divided into two smaller spaces by a contemporary aluminum window wall, and the west two postal windows have been removed to create more room for additional post office boxes (the east three windows remain). East of the lobby are the offices of the Postmaster and Assistant Postmaster, with the attendant hallway, vault and toilet; these remain as original. West of the lobby is the main stair to the second floor, an elevator and money order registry office (the office has been removed also to make room for additional post office boxes). The main workroom and mailing vestibule and platform are situated behind (to the north of) the lobby and remain in original configuration. Although altered somewhat by the addition of a suspended ceiling and some new wall finishes, the main lobby still features many of its original components, including: the terrazzo floor with brass strip inlay and marble borders, travertine walls and pilasters, decorative ironwork for the elevator surround and original iron writing tables. The stair to the second floor features marble treads set in a steel frame, plaster walls, terrazzo landings and decorative iron balustrade. The main workroom has its original plaster walls and ceiling with the inspector's gallery overhead.

The second and third floors are organized as series of office or court spaces lined along single U-shaped hallways. The heart of the building - and its most

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impressive space - is the courtroom centered on the north wall of the second floor. After the District Court moved from the building, this room was subdivided into a smaller court space for the Tax Court and an office space. The cut-down Tax Court still has many of the original courtroom elements, including travertine walls and pilaster shafts, stylized pilaster capitals and crown ornamentation made of terra cotta, coffered ceiling with decoratively cast plaster beams, marble wall base and oak furniture. The axis of the courtroom has been shifted from east-west, with the judge's bench centered on the east wall, to north-south with the bench on the north wall. The space has been altered in other ways: the addition of suspended ceiling between the plaster beams, carpeting, covering over of the north wall windows (no natural light now enters the room), addition of contemporary light fixtures and registers and - most unfortunate of all - painting of the polychrome terra cotta capitals and frieze ornaments. The upper story halls are in original condition, with terrazzo floors, plaster walls and ceilings with a moulded plaster crown and pilaster caps and dark oak doors and frames. Second and third story offices have undergone some change, primarily in the form of carpeting and suspended ceilings.

Summary

The Federal Building/U.S. Post Office is sited facing south within the six-block Civic Center just north of the central business district of Las Vegas. Set back from the sidewalk within a small grassed lawn, it is massed as a great three-story block - a brick box with terra cotta trim set upon a raised foundation. The building represents mainline, albeit eclectic, neoclassicism with its large flat-sided Ionic colonnades, formal loggia, classical moulded and dentiled entablature and Georgian balustraded parapet; it also displays the classical vertical hierarchy of base, body and cap, the base formed by the terra cotta sided first floor, the body by the upper story brick walls and great colonnades and the cap by the entablature and expressed parapet. The building has been maintained well, and the exterior appears today in almost original condition. The interior has undergone changes to accommodate the changing needs since its construction, but the changes have been made with some sensitivity, and the original character of the public spaces is retained. As a regionally important example of neoclassical public architecture, the Federal Building is one of the city's major historic buildings. It is a prominent landmark - the most refined and best preserved of Las Vegas' Depression-era architecture.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES	Designed: 1930-31 Built: 1931-33	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	James A. Wetmore Acting Supervising Architect
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE			

The significance of the Federal Building/Post Office in Las Vegas rests upon the building's intrinsic and representational values on a local level to the city. These values lie in two areas: architecture and politics/government. Architecturally, the building is representative of the eclectic revivalism which distinguished most public buildings designed by the Treasury Department's Supervising Architect's office in the 1920s and 1930s. Although it may not have succeeded in its intended role as an exemplar of good taste to be imitated by subsequent private structures (the most famous of which, of course, are the amazingly profligate casinos), the building is the most refined of Las Vegas' Depression-era architecture. It is a well-preserved and locally prominent example of its genre - a medium-scale public building of the early thirties. The Federal Building also represents the city's part of an extensive federal building program initiated in the late 1920s by the Hoover administration - the forerunner to Roosevelt's Public Works Administration. Like the immense Boulder Dam project, under construction at the same time, this building presented a locally prominent symbol of the presence of the federal government, and as the first federal building erected in Las Vegas, it was a source of pride for the city and a locally prominent landmark.

Addendum

Although the Federal Building completed in 1933 was the first civil federal structure erected in Las Vegas by the Treasury Department, it was not the first building put up specifically to house the postal facility. The 1933 building was preceded only four years by another. Actually, boosting for a federal building had begun two decades earlier in 1911 with the hope that Congress would include Las Vegas among the hundreds of communities across the country to receive post offices and courthouses. The government at the time was engaged in a fifteen-year construction binge which had begun around the turn of the century; however, increasingly vociferous criticism of porkbarrel politics dampened the enthusiasm in Congress for new building projects, and by the mid-1910s the program was halted. Las Vegas did not receive its building.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Addendum, Item 9

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2.01

UTM REFERENCES

A 11 667250 40041520
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Legal description: Parcel Number 020-250-004 City of Las Vegas

Property is located in City Park at the corner of Stewart and Third Streets, with 350.0' frontage on Stewart Street and a depth of 250.0' into the Park.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
none			

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Clayton B. Fraser, Principal

DATE

7 March 1982

ORGANIZATION

Fraserdesign

TELEPHONE

303-669-7969

STREET & NUMBER

1269 Cleveland Avenue Suite Two

STATE

Colorado 80537

CITY OR TOWN

Loveland

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES X

NO

NONE

Doyle Redden
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National State ✓ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Hopes for a new building were renewed in December 1923 with the announcement that the city was included in a public buildings appropriation in Washington. Local boosting for the building continued into the next year, and on 28 June 1924 the Las Vegas Age ran a lengthy argument for the proposed structure. Entitled "Public Building is Necessary to Meet Growth of Las Vegas," the article stated:

The room and equipment provided for the Las Vegas postoffice have long been inadequate. Within the last few months additional room and five hundred additional boxes have been provided for the office, but these are now being used nearly to the limit of capacity. With only a slight increase in the present business the enlarged quarters will be found inadequate and the public again obliged to suffer the inconveniences which were so annoying for several years. . . .

The present city proper was founded in the month of May 1905, by people who moved into it from the Original Townsite of Las Vegas, Nevada, which was generally known as the "construction camp" during the building of the railroad, and by people who came from every State in the Union; pioneers they were, but of a type who came to stay and build a city. . . .

There are no government buildings erected in the southern part of the State; yet the City of Las Vegas and the County of Clark have never failed to meet the call of the United States Government for any requirement demanded. . . . With a population of 4500 people, and with the population steadily increasing, and with no possibility of its growth being stopped or even retarded, we feel that we are entitled to proper postoffice facilities for the handling of United States mail by having an up-to-date Federal postoffice building.

However, Congress had not approved any authorization for new construction since the end of the earlier boom in 1913 and in 1924 was in no mood for new public buildings. The bill was defeated and with it the city's post office. It would not be until five years later, in 1929, that Las Vegas would receive its first post office building, erected not by the government but by a local businessman/contractor, P.J. Sullivan. Sullivan completed the building, a single-story brick structure, in June of that year, and it immediately opened as the city's post office. In a community grateful for any building, Sullivan's post office was well received. Reported the Age on 4 June:

The new postoffice opened for business yesterday morning at Second and Carson, and Las Vegas are becoming accustomed to the increased convenience made possible by the new structure and new equipment. The building, erected and owned by P.J. Sullivan, serves a long-felt need of the community it is agreed by all, and its opening has long been looked forward to by the community and postoffice workers alike.

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The government had signed a five-year lease and had installed some \$20,000 of new equipment in the building, but even before the new facility was opened the Treasury Department had already begun the search for a site for its new federal building. District Engineer Arthur Newman was dispatched to Las Vegas in August 1924 to assess several sites which had been offered for the building. Newman told city officials that \$20,000 had been appropriated for site acquisition but nothing had yet been set aside for building construction, adding, "Other localities are crying out for federal buildings, and competition for federal building money is keen in Washington. Las Vegas is fortunate in having friends in the U.S. senate and in the house who are close in the confidence of the administration and whose efforts have resulted in placing this city on the building program for this year." Newman's visit sparked another round of boosting for a new building. Again, the Age:

The need of Las Vegas for a federal building to house the post office as well as the administration officials of the Boulder Dam work and other governmental departments such as the United States court, U.S. Marshall's office, Commissioner, etc., all of which will need quarters in Vegas, has been recognized by the departments and Congress. . . .

There are hundreds of cities in the United States with claims for a federal building just as good as ours, in some cases, perhaps, better. Congressmen, senators and business men are every day exerting pressure in favor of their own projects and any valid excuse for delay in the Las Vegas project would be decidedly to the advantage of some other city.

For several years the work of securing recognition in our needs and desires has been under way. It was not easy to convince the men in power at Washington of the merit of our cause.

Now that our project is approved and on the program for immediate construction, it is to be hoped that no sectional controversies will arise. We each have our individual preferences. It may be that this site or that site will better serve our own particular interests. And whatever site is selected will not suit all of us.

Newman's veiled warning that the city could again lose its chance at a federal building if a site could not be secured quickly had its effect on city officials. A parcel of land that Las Vegas had been holding to build a city park was offered to the Treasury official, and it was accepted only after the city gave assurance that the site and adjacent streets would be improved. With a site secured, the Supervising Architect's office of the Treasury began to design the building.

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The Federal Building planned for Las Vegas was in reality part of an enormous construction program undertaken by Congress and the Hoover administration in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this period some 1300 new civil federal buildings were erected across the country, nearly doubling the number under the aegis of the Treasury Department. The program was initiated in 1926 - the first such federal initiative for public building construction since 1913 - with a Congressional authorization of \$165 million over a period of eleven years. The authorization was increased by \$125 million in 1928 and, with the Depression worsening, by \$330 million in 1930 and 1931. The total appropriation, including revenues from the sale of so-called obsolete structures which added \$69 million, hovered at \$700 million. According to Lois Craig in The Federal Presence: "In terms of establishing the image of the United States government, this program was the most important undertaken since the first few decades under the Constitution."

The massive construction effort was designed to serve three functions. First, it represented fiscal pragmatism and was calculated to reduce the rising rental costs incurred by the growing number of federal agencies in leased space. The program also afforded Congress an opportunity to distribute political presents in the form of post offices and courthouses, a type of logrolling it historically has found hard to resist. Finally, under the deepening shadow of the Depression, the building program was in the later years also a make-work program, intended to provide jobs for the local unemployed. A predecessor to the myriad New Deal programs (Roosevelt took office as the Las Vegas Federal Building was nearing completion), Hoover's building program was later absorbed within the Public Works Administration.

This renewed activity rekindled long dormant animosities between the Supervising Architect's (SA) office in the Treasury Department and private architects, represented by the American Institute of Architects. The AIA, protective of a membership beleaguered by the Depression, objected loudly to in-house design of federal buildings by the SA's office, which had increased its staff from 432 in 1929 to 750 in 1932. A 1931 Resolution of the AIA Board of Directors proclaimed:

We believe that the country is entitled to the services of the best architectural talent available, and that the concentration of so large a volume of work as the present appropriations provide, into the hands of a single Government bureau, must inevitably tend to produce stereotyped, mediocre and uninspiring results.

Architects railed against the SA repeatedly in the trade periodicals; American Architect was particularly fervent in its criticism, regularly publishing articles like "Government Architects Cannot Create Beauty" and "The Time Has Come for

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Government to Get Out of the Architecture Business." A counterattack was printed in the April 1933 Federal Architect, a magazine sympathetic to the SA:

The ethics of the profession has certainly taken a jolt when the architects of the country on letterheads of their A.I.A. Chapters blacken without investigation the work of other architects' offices with the naive and frank admission that it is for the purpose of getting architectural commissions for themselves.

The Federal Architectural offices are weaned and reared on criticism. If they use material A, delegations appear to lambaste them for not using material B. Or vice versa. If they face the building north, a newspaper crusade develops because it was not faced south. The bitter attacks of private architects are, therefore, merely the regular order. . . . But - one could have wished that architects would have stood by architects.

Although the Public Buildings Acts of 1926 and 1930 granted the Treasury Department the option to commission private architects for federal projects for the first time since the repeal of the Tarnsey Act in 1911, the Hoover administration used their services sparingly, and the fusillades continued throughout the early 1930s.

There were stylistic differences as well. At one extreme was the SA's office, which continued to advocate classicism as the appropriate symbolic expression for public buildings. The SA executed hundreds of buildings of varying scales with classical facades and detailing during the twenties and thirties. James A. Wetmore was the Acting Supervising Architect from 1915 to 1933. A graduate of the Georgetown University Law School, Wetmore was not himself an architect, the reason for the "Acting" before his title; stylistic direction for the office was given by the Superintendent of the Architectural Division Louis A. Simon, a stylistic traditionalist who later succeeded Wetmore as Supervising Architect - the Treasury's last. At the other end of the spectrum were a number of architects in the avant garde of the private sector. Embracing the tenets of the emerging Art Deco and Moderne styles (and a decade later the International style), these architects designed public buildings relatively unembellished by ornamentation and austere when compared with their classical predecessors. Between the two extremes, architects designed with a wide range of stylistic expression, combining new forms with borrowed revivalist or vernacular forms or motifs or somehow compromising between the classical and modern trends to create what is today termed "starved classicism."

The construction drawings completed by the SA for the Las Vegas Federal Building in early 1931 showed a building that was, typical for that office, mainstream

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neoclassicism. A rendering of the front elevation appeared in a September 1931 article in Architectural Forum magazine by Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Ferry K. Heath. On 22 July 1931, bids for construction of the building were opened in Washington. It appeared that Murch Brothers of Saint Louis had submitted the lowest proposal with a bid of \$247,000. However, the bid of Plains Construction Company from Pampa, Texas arrived several days later, reportedly help up in the mail. Plains' bid, \$10,000 below that of Murch Brothers, was accepted by the Treasury Department. Ever mindful of the cheapest bid, the government awarded the construction contract to an unproved contractor, although Murch Brothers had already built several federal buildings in cities all over the country. The city eagerly awaited construction of its long-awaited building, as the Evening Review-Journal reported on 1 August 1931:

Contract for construction of the new federal building to be erected at Las Vegas, was awarded this morning to the Plains Construction company at Pampas, Texas, on a bid of \$237,000, it was announced by officials of the treasury department.

The building as designed, will be a three story structure with full basement of brick and terra cotta construction - one of the finest of the smaller postoffices now being built, treasury department officials declared.

Construction commenced soon after, but problems began to crop up. In September 1931 it was discovered that the building under construction was 32' off-center from Third Street. With the excavation completed and foundations begun, Treasury officials decided to accept the building in its existing location, although as site inspector T.J. Williams stated: "If the building was erected according to the first plan, it would certainly make a much better appearance, as it would set nearer to the centerline of the city park and show up from the present business district as being at the end of North Third Street." As construction continued through the winter, more problems came up. Finally, on 8 February 1932 Plains' contract was terminated when it was discovered that the company's owner, J.O. Pearson, had forged the signatures of the sureties for his bond. The Salt Lake City and Dallas offices of the FBI were called in to investigate the irregularities, and a Grand Jury was convened in Amarillo on 2 May 1932 to consider criminal charges against Pearson. As the court case continued in Texas and subcontractors for Plains began to file claims against the government (which were rejected), the project was rebid by the Treasury Department; on 22 July the contract for construction of the remainder of the building was awarded to Rosen and Fischel, Inc. of Chicago. This new company

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had been the lowest of nineteen bidders with a proposal of \$220,553. Construction was begun soon thereafter and continued without further report of incident through the rest of the year and into 1933. In September postal officials began preparing for the move into the new building; it was made two months later as the new Federal Building was opened for business on November 27.

The operational history of the Federal Building has, unsurprisingly, consisted of the daily activities of the occupant agencies. Today it still houses the post office on the main floor, although the facility has been demoted from main office to station status with the construction of the new building in 1967. The second floor is occupied by the U.S. Tax Court (in the original District courtroom), the U.S. Army Recruiting Center and offices of the Bureau of Land Management; the third floor houses the offices of the Small Business Administration. Although the Federal Building at Las Vegas is not quite fifty years old, its shortfall is so minor as to be almost moot. The building is an important structure for the city, both architecturally and historically; a pivotal building in the central business district, it is a local landmark for Las Vegas - the first federal building erected in the city and a well-executed and -preserved example of 20th century neoclassical architecture.

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